

Trachtenberg Reports Death Threats

By Nathan Carrick

Staff Writer

Now she says it's personal and dangerous.

During the last two months, Councilmember Duchy Trachtenberg claims she has received dozens of threats, many of them death threats, from community members opposed to a bill she sponsored that guarantees civil rights for transgender individuals.

According to Trachtenberg, several people sent about 40 pieces of threatening correspondence to her home and office. Many of them were signed, she said, though some used fake names. Some were signed by members of Citizens for a Responsible Government, a group trying to get Trachtenberg's legislation repealed.

"These threats are directed at me because I have been a proponent for and sponsor of legislation protecting the rights of LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] individuals," Trachtenberg said. "I find it disturbing that these kinds of threats can be made so openly to public officials, threatening their safety."

Michelle Turner, a spokesperson for CRG, said the group doesn't send or support sending threatening letters. "We don't advocate anything like that at all," Turner said. "We're not in this to speak ill of any group or stand in judgment."

A senior policy analyst in Trachtenberg's office, Dr. Dana Beyer, also received threatening correspondence, the council member said. Beyer has been an outspoken opponent to CRG's petition.

In November the County Council unanimously passed bill 23-07, a piece of legislation Trachtenberg sponsored that protects transgender individuals against discrimination in housing and employment. Members of CRG believe the law gives pedophiles and sexual predators easy access to women's bathrooms and locker rooms.

Earlier this month CRG submitted a petition to the Montgomery County Board of Elections putting a referendum question about repealing what has become known as the Transgender Legislations on the ballot in November. Last week Equality Maryland, the state's largest LGBT advocacy group, filed a lawsuit against the county Board of Elections alleging an improper count.

Turner added that the leaders of CRG prefer a diplomatic approach. "We would be happy to sit down with Duchy [Trachtenberg] and have a civilized dialogue," Turner said. "Unfortunately she's a little hard to get a hold of. Plus, given the attitudes of many of those on the council, it doesn't seem like something they'd want to do."

Trachtenberg said that Sharon Kass, a member of CRG, has sent harassing letters to both her and Beyer. She said Kass suggested in one letter that Trachtenberg should worry about handling her own family before taking on these other issues. Trachtenberg has a son with schizophrenia.

Turner said, however, that Kass is more of a "supporter, and not what we consider a member."

Kass could not be reached for comment by press time, but she replied to an e-mail from The Sentinel requesting comment with e-mails containing anti-gay literature, including a brochure titled "Gay! You don't have to be," and a link to an article titled, "The Desire For A Sex Change: Psychiatrist says sex-change surgery is a collaboration with a mental disorder, not a treatment."

"Every organization has a fringe element - not to say she's on the fringe," Turner said. "We don't necessarily agree with everything she has to say. But don't quote me on that."

Trachtenberg said Beyer's two sons were mentioned in one e-mail, saying they are doomed to psychological problems because Beyer is a transgender individual. One of Beyer's sons is a student at Brown University, the other at the University of Maryland. Beyer could not be reached for comment by press time because County Council is on recess this week.

Trachtenberg declined to release copies of the threatening correspondences because she said police are investigating threats made repeatedly by some individuals. She added that several restraining orders might be issued as a result of the threats.

She read parts of a few letters to The Sentinel over the phone. "Put an end to Bill 23-07 or you won't live too long," said one, signed, Mr. Walker. Others were extremely vulgar, including one that said, "S*** a tranny's d***."

"I think they're just trying to intimidate a council member who is standing up for what's right," Trachtenberg said.

Extra security measures have been taken at the County Council building, and Trachtenberg said she is in the process of installing a home security system because of the threats.



County Councilwoman Duchy Trachtenberg